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Environmental News: 2017's Wildfires and Hurricanes  
Carried Climate Warnings and more

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January 3, 2017

*Critical information about the environment delivered weekly*



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"Nature has introduced great variety into the landscape, but man has displayed a passion for simplifying it. Thus he undoes the built-in checks and balances by which nature holds the species within bounds."

~Rachel Carson

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## How Federal Giveaways to Big Coal Leave Ranchers and Taxpayers Out in the Cold

On the morning after the autumn's first snow, L.J. Turner looked out over a creek near his house that reliably watered his family's livestock for more than 70 years. A third-generation Wyoming rancher, Turner remembered hunting rabbits there amid lush marsh grasses and high cottonwood trees when he was a boy in the 1950s.



Then the nation's three largest coal mines began to dig in downhill from his 10,000-acre ranch. To get to the coal, they blasted through and drained the region's aquifers. The marsh grasses vanished. The creek began to recede and eventually ran dry, as did a well Turner dug to feed a livestock watering trough. Read more at [WyoFile](#).



## Wildfires to Hurricanes, 2017's Year of Disasters Carried Climate Warnings

The Great Plains were already



crackling with the blazes of an unusually early fire season last spring when federal officials, warning of the costly impacts of climate change, asked Congress for help with overstretched firefighting budgets. Nobody could have foretold the ferocity of the fires that would close out 2017 in California.

In the Atlantic, [ocean temperature maps](#) were already colored in glaring hues by midsummer when hurricane forecasters heightened their alerts about a season that seemed likely to send more intense storms toward the Caribbean and the U.S. coast. Read more at [Inside Climate News](#).

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## **Coalition Wants Judge to Intervene in Flint Water Deal**

A coalition of religious, environmental and civil rights activists filed a motion Wednesday asking a federal judge to enforce a legal settlement requiring state and Flint officials to replace lead pipes and take other steps to ensure safe drinking water for city residents.



Under the settlement, reached in March, the state agreed to spend as much as \$97 million to address Flint's lead-contamination crisis by replacing lead and galvanized steel pipes in residents' homes and providing free bottled water and faucet filters. Learn more from [Detroit News](#).

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## **The Rarest Bird: Florida's Grasshopper Sparrow May go Extinct in 2018**



Get ready to say goodbye to Florida's rarest bird, the grasshopper sparrow. Federal officials say 2018 is the year we'll learn whether the species will disappear from the wild. The odds are not looking good. "There's a significant chance that the birds might go extinct," said Larry Williams, who supervises the South

Florida office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The grasshopper sparrow is generally regarded as the most endangered bird in the continental United States. If it goes extinct in spite of the \$1 million spent to save it in recent years, it would be the first American bird in three decades to disappear. Learn more from [Tampa Bay Times](#).

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## **After Pesticide Incidents Sicken Farmworkers, Advocates Push to Make Penalties Stronger**

Farmworker advocates say they hope four separate pesticide drift incidents this year that appeared to sicken more than 150 workers will





prompt state lawmakers to strengthen rules governing use of the agricultural chemicals. "These drift incidents happen all the time," said Valerie Gorospe, a community organizer with the [Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment](#), an environmental justice group based in Oakland and Delano, who has helped farmworkers in the aftermath of several chemical drift events. "Our current laws and our regulations that we have for the state of California are completely inadequate," Gorospe said. Get more information from [KQED](#).

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## **Analysis: Congress Attacked Endangered Species Every 6 Days in 2017**



"Republicans in Congress continue to attack the Endangered Species Act despite overwhelming support from Americans of all political stripes for this landmark conservation law," said Brett Hartl, government affairs director with the Center for Biological Diversity. "These attacks are designed to reward special interests that would plunder our natural resources even if it causes wildlife to go extinct."

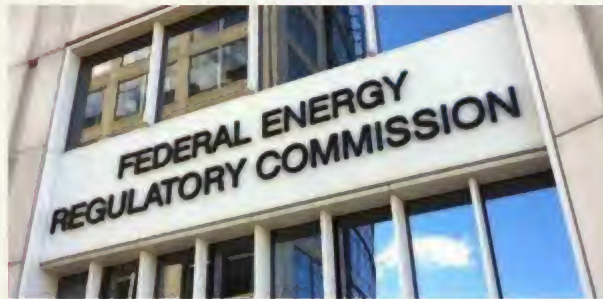
Unfortunately, with President Trump in the White House, "these types of attacks are more likely to become law, severely harming our nation's imperiled wildlife," the Center for Biological Diversity warned. Read more at [EcoWatch](#).

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## **FERC—Which Rejected Two Gas Pipelines Out of 400**

## Since 1999—Will Review Approval Policy

The new chairman for the U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), Kevin McIntyre, [says the agency plans to review](#) its permitting process and procedures for natural gas [pipelines](#).



FERC has come under fire for serving as a "[rubber stamp](#)" for these pipelines, which these days mostly carry gas obtained via the horizontal drilling and injection technique known as [hydraulic fracturing](#) or "[fracking](#)." The agency has rejected only two out of the approximately 400 pipeline applications received since 1999, when it last updated its gas pipeline review process. That's according to a [report](#) published in November by [Susan Tierney](#), currently employed by economic consulting firm Analysis Group and former [member](#) of the Obama-era Department of Energy's Natural Gas Subcommittee. Look further at [EcoWatch](#).

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## The Most Heroic Earthlings of 2017



"These people—from kid scientists to the folks who deliver our mail—are the unsung planetary heroes of 2017. Here are a few in no particular order.



**Gitanjali Rao**, this 12-year-old didn't sit idly by while a water crisis unfolded in the predominantly black city of Flint, Michigan. Sure, she lives in Colorado, but distance didn't stop her from taking action to help fix the situation that left nearly 100,000 people exposed to lead-contaminated drinking water." To learn more about Gitanjali Rao or other "heroic earthlings" check out [EARTHER](#).

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The Rachel Carson Council, founded in 1965, is the national environmental organization envisioned by Rachel Carson to carry on her work after her death. We promote Carson's ecological ethic that combines scientific concern for the environment and human health with a sense of wonder and reverence for all forms of life in order to build a sustainable, just, and peaceful future.

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